

Traditional Schools vs. Mastery-Based Schools: What's the Difference?

At Traditional Schools...	At Mastery-Based Schools...
Teachers Make the Decisions: Teachers decide what students learn and when they move on. Lessons are led by teachers, and students have little say in their learning. As a result, students tend to focus more on deadlines and grades, which can make learning feel like a chore.	Students Take Charge of Their Learning: Students are active partners in their learning. They help set goals, choose learning activities, and track their progress. By focusing on growth and understanding, students feel a sense of purpose and ownership that goes beyond earning points.
Everyone Moves at the Same Speed: All students move through lessons at the same speed, following a set schedule. Some students may move on before they're ready, while others feel bored because the pace is too slow for them.	Students Learn at Their Own Speed: Students learn at their own speed. Those who understand quickly can move ahead, while students who need more time can continue practicing until they're ready to move on.
Moving Ahead Without Mastery: Students move ahead to the next lesson, unit, or grade level based on a set schedule—like finishing a semester or year—rather than mastering the material. This can create gaps in understanding that make future learning harder and reteaching necessary.	Moving Ahead Only When Ready: Students move forward only when they've shown they fully understand the current material. This ensures they don't have gaps in their learning, making future lessons easier and reducing the need for reteaching.
High-Stakes Tests with No Second Chances: Students often take big, end-of-unit tests where their grade depends on how well they do in one try. If they don't do well, they may not have a chance to fix mistakes or improve.	Frequent Check-Ins for Steady Progress: Students are assessed regularly with smaller, low-pressure check-ins. They can revise their work, retake tests, and keep improving until they fully understand the material.
Struggles Lead to Discouragement: Because success often depends on doing well on a single test or assignment, students who struggle the first time may become discouraged and believe they're not good at a subject. When grades are the main focus, it's hard for them to see a path to improvement or feel motivated to keep trying.	Struggles Are a Chance to Improve: Students understand that struggling is a normal part of the learning process. They receive feedback, take time to improve, and see their progress along the way. This helps them build confidence, knowing they can get better through effort and persistence, not just by getting things right the first time.